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## **“THE POSSESSION OF KNOWLEDGE CARRIES AN ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY”**

Fundamentally, the possession of knowledge may be used to advance whoever or whatever's agenda; whether moral relativism or universal values apply to the individual or body are the two arguments which arise directly in this situation. Nevertheless the notion of knowledge being possessed stimulates debate as it can be argued that knowledge is discovered and not owned, that it is eternal and therefore Humankind must discover such knowledge to widen their realm of understanding. This brings in chiefly, the thoughts of Immanuel Kant and John Stuart Mill who have conflicting philosophies bring different foundations to the ethical responsibility of using knowledge.

The Central Intelligence Agency, CIA, is responsible for gathering information throughout the world on various events and individuals. However it is highly secretive from the public and often turns suspected 'spies' or 'threats' for the sake of their security regardless of the status of the person. In addition, the Roman Catholic Church has for centuries has been criticized by many historians and conspiracy theorists for keeping certain information, mainly of the various versions of the bible, away from the general religious understanding and practice. These organizations have managed to withhold information on from the general public by their own authority through religious or government affiliation. Therefore this suggests that certain knowledge can be owned since there is evidence to suggest that organization with the responsibility of distributing knowledge, like the CIA and the Roman Catholic Church, also withhold information which the mainstream public can't physically access.

However in contrast, one can argue that knowledge is separate from our own awareness, beyond our sense perception and reasoning. Arguing that knowledge exists eternally outside the human realm of understanding and therefore knowledge is discovered rather than owned by a single consciousness. Therefore Sir Isaac Newton's discovery of gravity was an instance where he was the first in modern human history to understand gravity. Yet gravity had existed before human existence and will continue to thereafter, but it was through his investigation by which gravity entered the human realm of understanding. He had used perception to first investigate gravity which drove his curiosity to understand it and henceforth reason and deduce the dynamics of gravity. The main point is however, that gravity has existed eternally and therefore illustrates a timeless phenomena which Newton had become aware of but did not own and thus challenging the idea of "possessing" knowledge.

This argument also agrees with the work of John Locke and David Hume through their approach to empiricism. Empiricism proposes that all knowledge is gained by the senses and that our existence is an amalgamation of such. Taking a peach for instance, we know that it is yellow, round and fragrant, Hume and Locke propose that if you take these properties away you have nothing and therefore human beings are a collection of properties which give the outward appearance of existence. Justifying why knowledge can be gained empirically, ergo our senses are

the soul deliberator in recognizing phenomena such as gravity, as Newton sensed the situation and reasoned using the scientific method to understand it.

Moreover one can argue that not all knowledge requires ethical responsibility. For instance with the two areas of knowledge science and religion, both have had positive and negative effects societies throughout the world. However It can be argued that this due to their own nature of spreading information, withholding some and trying to amass control over populations. In other words science and religion both operate in the same way and it is through such that they have managed to heavily exert their influence in the world. History has demonstrated that the operation of both science and religion have remained the same, whether it be conflicting religions vying for sociopolitical dominance like the crusaders against Arabs of the tenth and thirteenth centuries or through scientific theories and methods being tested against others, such as Einstein and his knowledge on nuclear fission which would lead to Oppenheimer's development of the atom bomb. Furthermore, the developments of the Renaissance enlightened Europe to the rest of the world and a flood of new technologies unfolded; bringing improvements in medicine and maritime technology, but also bringing gun powder and improved weaponry which would be used to a greater effect than before on the battlefield. As knowledge develops and improves overtime, their effect adapt with it. Therefore it can be said that knowledge has consequences that are unforeseen and affect society both positively and negatively.

In contrast however ethical responsibility suggests that it lies with the individual rather than the social advances in science and religion. Concerning much more on how that individual chooses to apply their new knowledge according to the morally relative or universal values which they adhere to. Einstein decided to share his new found knowledge on nuclear physics, but in doing so was he responsible for the atom bomb? This suggestion follows Kant's approach to duty and it's conflicting nature; as a scientist was it Einstein's ethical responsibility to share his knowledge to the rest of the scientific community, including the weapons development area? It was through imparting this knowledge to scientist like Oppenheimer which were directly involved in the development of the atom bomb. Oppenheimer chose to create a weapon which harnessed the information gained from Einstein, but was he ethically irresponsible? That question depends on the individual and the morals they followed. It is obvious that the atom bomb was constructed for military purposes, to bring America's war with Japan to an end faster; therefore was Oppenheimer trying to optimize warfare? Given his role was he simply trying to fulfill his duty as a scientist? According to Kant he was and therefore morally justifies his role in developing the atom bomb. In addition, the atom bomb would lead to great breakthroughs in medical technology such as radiation treatment for cancer as well as energy by nuclear power.

Yet the atom bomb killed thousands of people and therefore according to universal values Oppenheimer would be immoral and ethically responsible, despite the positive consequences which followed the atomic bomb.

Nonetheless, history has shown that Oppenheimer was not held accountable for his actions as he played the crucial role in ending WWII with the American victory over Japan. Oppenheimer was rewarded for his role and became the director of the Institute of Advanced study at Princeton. More importantly, he was on the "winning side" and therefore enjoyed it's benefits, had America lost, Japan would have held him accountable and imposed their own ethics to decide the fate of

him. Raising the argument of moral relativism and how it is determined on a national scale amongst society and its similarities and differences with the morals of other nations. Given the context, America was engaged in a war with Japan, propaganda and nationalism had socially justified the bombing of Hiroshima and therefore rewarding Oppenheimer for his role. Therefore in looking at what morally justified Oppenheimer, one can see that society had a crucial role in establishing war sentiment, galvanized for America to win the society was willing to accept the bombing for the greater good.

This moves into conflicting theories proposed by Kant and the utilitarian theories of John Stuart Mill who proposed that the "ends justify the means." The Utilitarian argument is the best basis of support for morally justifying Oppenheimer and the creation of the atomic bomb as in the end it resulted in more people benefiting from nuclear fission than those who died from it. However Kant supports that each individual is his or her own moral agent and therefore must morally operate with the basis of an absolute or universal ethical code no matter the effect. Utilitarianism on the other hand suggests that the morality of an individual's decision is based on making the greatest number of people happy, concentrating on the effect rather than action. Nevertheless it is important to recognize the two opposing philosophies which either celebrate or condemn Oppenheimer.

In conclusion, upon evaluating this claim it is crucial to consider the nature of attaining knowledge and what types of knowledge can really be "possessed." How organizations are able to withhold knowledge from society, but also how some knowledge does not have a definite owner due to it being discovered: the existence of gravity. Furthermore according to Kant and Mill their theories both justify the need for responsibility in the use of knowledge however their fundamental principles collide. Kant's transcendental idealism establishes that there is an absolute good and evil, and our decisions are based on such. Utilitarianism as proposed by Mill suggests that individuals must seek for the "greater good" and that the "ends justify the means."

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